



New Heaven and New Earth

12

Key Theme

- God is faithful to His promises.

Key Passages

- 2 Peter 3:1–13; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 21:1–8, 21:22–22:5

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain what will happen to the earth we live on.
- Describe what God has planned for believers and unbelievers.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “What is the connection between the Flood and the Consummation?”

Students will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet. If time allows, have them recite the verse together.



Studying God’s Word

God has planned what will happen at the end of time. He promised in His Word that believers can look forward to a time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth with no more sin. It will be a place where they will enjoy eternity with the one true and glorious God. But unbelievers will be separated from God and suffer eternal punishment.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: The Wolf and the Lamb

Students will draw conclusions about the restoration of the new earth and the state of the original creation.

Student Guides

Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

The Bible tells us the history of the universe—from the Creation of all things in the book of Genesis to the Consummation when God will end history and fulfill His plan for the universe. The Consummation includes major events that are promised in the Scriptures. One of those events is the promised return of Jesus Christ in glory! The Bible tells us that the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God! The saints of God will meet the Lord in the air and will then be with Him always (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

Another event the Consummation will include is the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. This new creation was written about in the Old Testament in Isaiah 65:17, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.” Peter mentions the new heavens in the New Testament as well. He speaks of God’s promise of the new heaven and new earth in which righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13). And in the book of Revelation, John’s vision included a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (Revelation 21:1).

What will the new creation be like? Well, there was a time when God’s creation was perfect, and He described it as “very good” (Genesis 1:31). That was the original creation, before sin entered the world, where Adam and Eve were created and lived. But, that very good creation did not last long. Adam and Eve sinned, and their sin brought God’s curse of death, disease, and suffering into the world (Romans 5:12). And we see and live in that cursed world today!

But as discussed above, God has promised a new heaven and a new earth. This new heaven and new earth will be a restoration of ALL things from the wicked, evil, sinful, and dark world we see now to the “very good” state that was the original creation. John got a glimpse of this new creation when he heard a loud voice from heaven proclaiming that the tabernacle of God would be with men. God would dwell with His people. And in so doing, all sorrow, death, crying, and pain would pass away. All things would indeed be made new and good in the presence of God Himself (Revelation 21:3–5). This is a glorious hope—one that can only be imagined—that believers would have the privilege to stand before the

throne of God and spend eternity in a place where there would be no need of sun or moon to shine because the glory of God will be there and the Lamb—Jesus Christ—will be its light (Revelation 21:23)!

But the Consummation will also include a judgment. And all unbelievers—those who never bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, the Savior, those who have never repented and trusted Christ completely for their forgiveness and salvation, will be judged according to their works. And their works are as filthy rags before the holy, Creator God (Isaiah 64:6). Their names will not appear in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15). These unbelievers will be known as the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars. And God has ordained that they will finally have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone forever and ever (Revelation 21:8).

Jesus Christ came to earth as the perfect sacrifice, the righteous for the unrighteous, that sinners may come into the presence of God through His righteousness. And His Word says that whoever believes in Him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because He has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son (John 3:18).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND¹

The subject of heaven and what it is like is a very popular one in our culture today. There have been many books written on the topic recently, particularly books by those who supposedly went to heaven and returned to tell us about it. A few of the titles include *Heaven Is for Real*, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, *Proof of Heaven*, *To Heaven and Back*, *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*, *Flight to Heaven*, *My Journey to Heaven*, *Waking Up in Heaven*, *My Time in Heaven*, *Heaven Is: A Visit to Heaven*, *Heaven Is So Real*, *A Divine Revelation of Heaven*, *Revealing Heaven: An Eyewitness Account*, *40 Days in Heaven*, *My Trip to Heaven*. Each of these books relates the story of someone who visited heaven—either as a near-death experience, in a divine vision, or who received a personal tour of heaven. Their stories are full of specific details about what heaven is like, who is there, and what is happening in the celestial realm. But when we compare their claims with Scripture, it becomes clear that they are merely figments of

¹ Adapted from John MacArthur, “Are Visits to Heaven for Real?” <https://answersingenesis.org/reviews/books/are-visits-to-heaven-for-real/>

the human imagination, not true visions of heaven as it is described in God's Word.

We live in a self-absorbed culture, and it shows in these accounts of people who claim they've been to heaven. They sound as if they viewed paradise in a mirror, keeping themselves in the foreground. They say comparatively little about God or His glory. But the glory of God is what the Bible says fills, illuminates, and defines heaven. Instead, the authors of these stories seem obsessed with details like how good they felt—how peaceful, how happy, how comforted they were; how they received privileges and accolades; how fun and enlightening their experience was; and how many things they think they now understand perfectly that could never be gleaned from Scripture alone. In short, they glorify self while barely noticing God's glory. They highlight everything but what's truly important about heaven.

There is simply no reason to believe anyone who claims to have gone to heaven and returned. John 3:13 says, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man." And John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time."

Four biblical authors had visions of heaven—not near-death experiences. Isaiah and Ezekiel (Old Testament prophets) and Paul and John (New Testament apostles) all had such visions. Only three of these men later wrote about what they saw—and the details they gave were comparatively sparse (Isaiah 6:1–4; Ezekiel 1, 10; Revelation 4–6). All of them focused properly on God's glory. They also mentioned their own fear and shame in the presence of such glory. They had nothing to say about the mundane features that are so prominent in modern tales about heaven (things like picnics, games, juvenile attractions, familiar faces, odd conversations, and so on). Paul gave no actual description of heaven but simply said what he saw would be unlawful to utter. In short, the biblical descriptions of heaven could hardly be any more different from today's fanciful stories about heaven.

What God has revealed in Scripture is the only legitimate place to get a clear understanding of the heavenly kingdom. God's written Word does in fact give us a remarkably full and clear picture of heaven and the spiritual realm. But the Bible still leaves many questions unanswered.

We need to accept the boundaries that God Himself has put on what He has revealed. It is sheer folly to speculate where Scripture is silent. And it is seriously dangerous to listen to anyone who claims to know more about God, heaven, angels, or the afterlife than God Himself has revealed to us in Scripture.

It is, however, right and beneficial for Christians to fix their hearts on heaven. Scripture commands us to cultivate that perspective: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1–2). "While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

Such a perspective is the very essence of true faith, according to Hebrews 11. Those with authentic, biblical faith acknowledge that they are strangers and pilgrims on this earth (v. 13). They are seeking a heavenly homeland (v. 14). They "desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (v. 16). The "city" that verse refers to is the heavenly Jerusalem, an unimaginable place—the very capital of heaven. It will be the eternal abode of the redeemed. No wonder Christians are intrigued with the subject.

But no matter how much they might obsess over what heaven is like, people who fill their heads with a lot of fantastic or delusional ideas from others' near-death experiences have not truly set their minds on things above. If the inerrant biblical truth God has given us is the only reliable knowledge about heaven we have access to (and it is), then that is what should grip our hearts and minds, not the dreams and speculations of human minds.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Jesus, you are King of kings and Lord of lords. One day in the new heaven and new earth, you will reign. You have made a way through Jesus Christ for sinners to dwell with you for all eternity. Help us to realize that this world and the things of the world are passing away. Help us all to grasp the amazing wonder of this truth. Please move in the hearts of my students to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. May they delight in you and your Word for the rest of their days as they look forward to the new creation you have promised.

Review

Last week we began to look at the final event in the history of God’s creation—the Consummation. We focused on the Second Coming of Jesus that will usher in the end of all things. While there is disagreement on exactly how all of those events will play out, we have a sure hope that Christ will return for those whom He has been preparing a

place. We know this will happen because we trust in God’s character and know He will fulfill His promises.

Today we are going to continue looking at the Consummation, focusing on what happens to the earth we are presently living on and where people will spend eternity.



► Write on the board, “What is the connection between the Flood and the Consummation?”

2 Peter 3:1–13



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read 2 Peter 3:1–3 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What type of writing is this?** *This is an epistle offering encouragement and instruction.*
- ? **Who is the author?** *Peter.*
- ? **Who is Peter’s audience?** *Those who have obtained faith through the righteousness of Christ—Christians.*
- ? **What was Peter’s purpose according to verse 2?** *Peter is calling them to remember what was written by the holy prophets and taught by the apostles.*
- ? **What is meant by “the holy prophets”?** *Peter is referencing the Old Testament writings.*
- ? **What did Peter mean by “knowing this first”?** *The phrase here is intended to communicate importance, not timing.*
- ? **What did Peter want them to know?** *That scoffers would come in the last days.*
- ? **What characterizes their conduct?** *Following their own lusts.*
- ? **What message will they promote?** *They will deny the Second Coming of Jesus, saying that all things are continuing just as they always have from the beginning.*
- ? **How does Peter describe the attitude of their error?** *They willfully forget, so it is an intentional act of the will.*
- ? **What do the scoffers willfully forget?** *They willfully forget 1) the creation of the universe by the word of God and 2) the Flood which destroyed the earth.*

- ? **What is the underlying philosophy of these scoffers when it comes to looking at how the world operates?** *While they do not deny God's existence or that He created, they believe there is some function of the created order that follows a pattern that has not changed since the creation of the world. Things happen today in the same way they happened in the past.*
- ? **Does this philosophy have a modern counterpart?** *The modern idea of uniformitarianism could be included in this philosophy. In this view, the slow and gradual processes we see in the created order today are the same as what happened in the past.*
- ? **What are these scoffers attempting to avoid with this uniformitarian philosophy?** *They are trying to dismiss the coming judgment at the return of Christ.*
- ? **What events do the scoffers have to deny in order to hold their view?** *They must deny the global nature of the Flood and possibly the supernatural creation of the universe in six days as described in the Bible.*
- ? **What future event did Peter point to?** *He pointed forward to the coming judgment of ungodly men.*
- ? **How will this coming judgment be accomplished?** *The idea of fire consuming and cleansing everything is repeated several times in verses 7, 10, and 12. The elements (basic parts) of the earth will melt with fervent heat.*
- ? **What is the extent of this judgment?** *It is global in extent.*
- ? **What is the relationship between the creation of the world and the preservation of the current world?** *Both are accomplished by the "word of God" as their source of power.*
- ? **What comparison did Peter make about time in God's mind?** *He relates one day to 1,000 years and vice-versa.*
- ? **What is the intent of Peter's comparison in verse 8?** *The intent is to show that God is outside of time, and Peter wants the readers to keep that point in the front of their thinking.*
- ? **What promise was Peter referencing in verse 9?** *The promise of the return of Christ and, consequently, the salvation of people who would meet Christ at His coming.*
- ? **Who is the "us" referred to in verse 9?** *The context indicates that Peter is referring to believers in Christ, the "beloved" of verse 8.*
- ? **What is God's attitude toward those mentioned in verse 9?** *He is longsuffering, not wishing that any should perish but come to repentance.*
- ? **How will the day of the Lord come?** *As a thief in the night.*
- ? **What will happen to the earth and its works and the heavens?** *They will all be consumed by fervent heat, being burned up or dissolved.*
- ? **What will happen to the earth and heavens?** *They will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth.*
- ? **What will they be like?** *Righteousness will dwell in them.*
- ? **How should believers behave in light of these truths?** *They should pursue holy conduct and godliness, looking forward to the day of the Lord.*

➤ There is disagreement among interpreters about whether the "any" of verse 9 refers to all men or to the "us" of the immediate context.

Discover the Truth

The arguments that we see Peter refuting here seem to be very similar to the claims being made by those with a uniformitarian view of earth history. Uniformitarianism teaches that the rate of things happening in the present is the rate they have always happened—the present is the key to the past. Ideas like the universe forming from the big bang and the gradual formation of rock layers over millions of years are uniformitarian. This view must deny supernatural catastrophes like the Flood and rapid special creation.

They scoff and mock Christians who believe in a young earth, pointing to the billions of years they claim the earth has existed, noting that since we can't trust the history in the Bible we shouldn't trust what it says about the future. Examining the rock layers and fossils from their old-earth view, they say, "If there really wasn't a global Flood like the Bible says, we can't trust the Bible. If Moses was wrong then Peter is wrong." Unfortunately, they do so to their own peril, facing the just judgment of God for their sin against and rejection of Him.

But that thinking does not only come from outside the church by people who deny God's existence, but also by those who believe in God and may even claim to believe in the Bible. Many Christians today believe in a uniformitarian view of earth history which denies that the Flood was a global event, but they still believe that there will be a Second Coming of Christ. But this exposes an inconsistency in their thinking. If the Flood was not a global judgment event against sin, why should we believe the Second Coming and judgment by fire is a real event? This inconsistency demonstrates the importance of looking to the Scriptures alone as sufficient to understand the world around us. To be sure, not everyone who believes in a uniformitarian history denies Christ's return and the final judgment, but it seems to be an inconsistent position to hold. Why trust the Bible to tell us about certain earthly events in the future while rejecting the earthly events Scripture describes in the past? To resolve this, many point to the Flood as a localized event and develop other ideas to explain away the contradictions and inconsistencies.

HOLY

OMNIPOTENT

? What attributes of God are evident in His judgment described in this passage? *His holiness and justice are evident in the judgment, while His mercy and grace are evident in the salvation of some. The absolute and utter cleansing displays His omnipotence.*

As Peter tells his readers that the scoffers willfully forget about all God has done and deny His works of judgment in the past, he calls the readers to not forget about God's promises of salvation in the future. But those promises are based on knowing that He has been faithful in the past. Just as God promised to bring the Flood as judgment, He promises to bring fire to cleanse the earth in the end.





The Wolf and the Lamb

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

You may wish to walk through this section with the students rather than having them work alone.

There is another inconsistency that becomes apparent as we consider the old-earth view of the earth and the coming restoration in the new earth.

In your Student Guides you will find The Wolf and the Lamb activity. Take a minute to answer the questions there and see if you can recognize the potential problem that believing in an earth where death was present before sin and can be seen in the fossil record before humans are supposed to have been present.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's look at what you found in this brief mental exercise.

1. How does Peter describe the future state in Acts 3:21 (you may also consider Romans 8:20–21)? *The earth will be restored at some point in the future. All of creation, not just humanity, was subjected to corruption at the Fall and awaits the redemption in the restoration of all things.*
2. What does the word “restoration” mean? *To return to the original condition.*
3. How is the original creation described in Genesis 1:29–31? *God describes all He has created as*

“very good” and the animals are all eating plants, not one another.

4. What does this imply about the state of the world before sin entered? *It was perfect; there must have been no death since the animals were all vegetarian and the diseases and other things that cause death should not be considered to be good.*

5. How is the future described in Isaiah 11:6–9? (Whether this is an earthly millennium or the new earth, the point of restoration is still relevant.) *The original vegetarian condition is restored in this scene and there is no carnivorous activity or harm to humans from animals that were once dangerous in the cursed creation.*

6. If we accept that there was animal death before Adam sinned, what would a restoration to the original state in the new earth look like? *If the new earth is a restoration of what things were originally like in the perfect creation before the Fall, then we would not expect to see any death in the new earth. If we accept that the original creation included the carnivory, disease, and other harmful things we find in the fossil record, then the restored new earth would have those elements as well.*

Now what we have just done is a fairly simplistic exercise, and there are many more passages of Scripture to consider before we could fully understand this idea. But any position on the origin of the earth that allows for the death of animals, and the diseases like tumors and arthritis we find evidence of in the fossil record, would have to explain how the new earth will be something other than a restoration of the original creation.



READ THE WORD

Revelation 21:1–8

We are going to look at two passages in the book of Revelation that talk about the glory of the new earth that we will dwell in for eternity after the judgment. We often refer to this as heaven, but let's see what the text has to teach us. Open to Revelation 21:1–8. and let's read it together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What did John see?** *A new heaven and a new earth.*
- ? **What had happened to the first earth?** *It had passed away. This is what was described earlier in 2 Peter 3.*
- ? **What descended from heaven?** *The New Jerusalem.*
- ? **What does the voice from heaven say God will do?** *God will dwell among His people and wipe away all of their tears.*
- ? **What will be absent in the new earth?** *There will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain as there was previously on the first earth.*
- ? **When God speaks from His throne in verse 5, what does He claim?** *He says that He makes all things new. This is another reference to the restoration of the original perfect creation.*
- ? **How does God describe His words?** *True and faithful.*
- ? **How does God describe Himself?** *He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. He is sovereign over all of His creation, old and new.*
- ? **Who will dwell on the new earth with God?** *Those who have thirsted for salvation and who have overcome will be with God.*
- ? **What is the fate of the sinful people?** *They face the second death of being cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.*
- ? **What will happen to these people? Look at the verse for the answer.** *Revelation 21:8. They will go to the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, the second death.*
- ? **What is that talking about?** *Allow discussion. This is what is commonly referred to as hell.*

Scripture is clear that there will be eternal punishment for everyone who does not believe in the name of Jesus Christ. All who reject the salvation Jesus offers, and refuse to repent and trust Him alone for forgiveness, will go to hell for all eternity. This list of sins shows the lifestyle of those who have rejected the truth. This is a difficult truth—but it is the truth from God's Word. And we must not shrink back from warning unbelievers of the dire consequences of sin, and plead with them to turn to Christ for salvation.

- ? Turn now to 2 Thessalonians 1:9. This tells more about what will happen to people who do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Will someone read that? *Choose a student to read the verse.*
- ? What will God do to those who turn away from Him and refuse to believe and trust in Jesus Christ? *They will be punished with everlasting destruction.*

God is just, and He must judge sin. Sinners who do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ will be punished in the lake of fire forever. They will be separated from God's presence and the power of His glory forever. This is a difficult truth for some. And as a result, some have decided that hell doesn't exist—that everyone will eventually be saved. But, instead of shrinking back from the clear teaching of Scripture in this area because it may be difficult, rather it should motivate us that much more to tell others of the gospel of Christ—the only hope there is for sinners.

We are going to jump over the detailed description of the New Jerusalem and move to 21:22, reading from there to 22:5. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

- ? Why is there no Temple in the New Jerusalem? *Because God and Jesus, the Lamb, are the Temple.*
- ? Why is there no need for the sun and moon? *The light of the glory of God in the lamb are its light and outshine the sun and moon. Note that this verse does not indicate that there is no sun or moon, just that they are not needed to illuminate the city.*
- ? What will never enter the New Jerusalem? *Nothing that is abominable, defiling, or sinful. This indicates that there is no sin in the presence of God in the new earth.*
- ? How is the river there described? *It is pure and filled with the water of life, as clear as crystal, and flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb.*
- ? What tree is present? *The tree of life.*
- ? What imagery does this bring to mind? *The original Garden of Eden had one river flowing out of it and the tree of life. Again, this is more imagery that indicates the restoration to the original perfect creation.*
- ? What tree is not present? *The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is absent. There will be no opportunity or desire to sin in the new earth.*
- ? What has happened to the curse? *The curse has been removed and reversed.*
- ? What will the people be doing? *Here they are said to be serving God. Elsewhere we see descriptions of worship and other activities.*
- ? How is the presence of God indicated in verse 4? *Those in the new earth will be able to see God face to face.*
- ? What is there no need for a lamp? *Again, the Lord God is the light.*
- ? How long will this go on? *Forever and ever.*

Discover the Truth

And that is what we have to look forward to at the Consummation of all things—a new earth that is restored to its original creation where God will dwell among His people. As we look forward to the hope of heaven, that heaven is the state we find ourselves in on the new earth.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

While there is much more to learn about our future state in the new earth, a truly heavenly existence for eternity, we have to stop there for now. But even with this brief glimpse, I trust you can begin to understand what our future holds. Eternal life is not some fuzzy ethereal experience or sitting on clouds strumming harps. It is serving our God and experiencing His presence forever and ever. We will get to worship and serve God with no sinful distractions in our glorified bodies. What we now only see through a distorted reflection, we will see face to face in all of the glory that is in the face of Jesus Christ.

This earth which is corrupted and stained by sin and the Curse will be purged with fire only to be recreated into a paradise where we will spend an eternity with God. While in this life we fight against our own sinful flesh and the physical and emotional pain we experience, we can eagerly long for the hope of eternal life with God, experiencing Him in all of His glory. We would do well to fix our minds on what that will be like more often than we do, knowing that we look forward to dwelling in the heavenly city to worship and serve our great God and Savior forever.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? What have you learned in this lesson that gives you a new perspective on the future? *Discuss various answers.*

? **What are some of the questions you still have about our eternal life?** *Discuss various answers encouraging students to search out the answers. Direct them to resources you trust in this area.*

? **What common ideas about heaven have you heard or learned that don't seem to come out of Scripture?** *Many people have false notions about the heavenly state based on representations in books, movies, and other media. Recently there have been a series of books describing supposed trips to heaven, but these contain ideas that do not come from Scripture and often contradict Scripture. Some of these books about trips to heaven or hell have been acknowledged as fabrications. Regardless, we should regard Scripture as sufficient for telling us what God would have us understand about heaven rather than relying on extra-biblical revelations that contradict one another and Scripture. Refer students to the Historical and Apologetics Background section of this lesson for more information.*

? **Some people criticize Christians for being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good. How can we respond to this criticism in a way that honors Christ?** *We are called in Scripture to set our minds on the things above (Colossians 3:1–4), and the saints in Hebrews 11 are commended for looking forward to the heavenly city rather than valuing the things here on earth. Knowing what Scripture teaches about eternal life should motivate us to serve and love others here on the earth more and encourage us to share the gospel so that there will be a new earth filled with people worshipping and serving the Lamb who is worthy to be praised forever and ever.*

? **If you hold to an old-earth view, or know someone who does, how can you use what we have learned in this lesson to reconcile the problem this position has of “restoration”?** *Discuss various answers including studying the numerous attempts to explain away this problem or to resolve it some manner. Encourage students to look at articles or books that address this question more fully than what was covered in the lesson.*



MEMORY VERSE

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His promise to reverse the Curse and restore all things.
- Praise God for His holiness that we will one day behold.
- Ask God for perseverance as we look forward to Christ's return.

